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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003257

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: UAE MFA OFFICIAL'S PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF IRAQ
-- CALL FOR "STRONG MAN"

A) STATE 124125, B) ABU DHABI 3097

Classified by CDA Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA's second-in-command, Acting Under Secretary Tareq Al-Haidan, offered the Charge his strong

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views on the poor security situation in Iraq on August 12. He said the Secretary's call for a "new Middle East" in the context of the Lebanon conflict begged the question of what sort of democracy the U.S. sought, arguing for a slower transition from central authority. Al-Haidan opined that what Iraq needs is a "strong man" and decisive central government to bring stability -- a prerequisite for non-violent political reform. He said the current "disaster" opened the way for outside (Al-Qa'eda and Iranian) influence. Al-Haidan said the UAE had "no one" in its Embassy in Baghdad due to security concerns and could not urge investors to invest in a country they could not safely visit. End summary.

¶2. (C) Acting MFA Under Secretary Tareq Al-Haidan (number two in the Ministry) pressed the Charge August 12 on the security situation in Iraq and the meaning of the "new Middle East" that the Secretary referred to in public comments on the Lebanon conflict. Asking "what is this new Middle East" (a question echoed also in recent UAE editorials), Al-Haidan lamented the international isolation of the democratically-elected Hamas government and asked "what kind of democracy" the U.S. sought. He stressed that democracy sometimes brings unfavorable results and that we should deal with the regional situation "as it is" before pressing for democracy as the answer. In Afghanistan, he said, "last year was better than this year" in terms of stability and progress. A country needs time to make the transition, he argued.

¶3. (C) On Iraq, Al-Haidan suggested a "five-year transition" to democracy. The country needed a strong central government, he argued, and to achieve control over the security situation in particular before introducing democracy "in a measured way" over time. Iraq needs the tools of effective governance and authority to control developments. Al-Haidan said that a strong central authority acceptable to the coalition, the Iraqi people, and regional neighbors would be preferable to a Prime Minister who did "not know what was going on" outside of Baghdad. He referred to the "disaster" of an Iraqi Cabinet whose members would participate in meetings and then refer to their various political factions for guidance rather than implementing government decisions. He said the Iraqi Prime Minister had no control. Without a strong central government, Al-Haidan lamented, "you have opened the way for Al-Qa'eda and Iran to work freely in Iraq."

14. (C) Stability was imperative before Iraq's neighbors could effectively discuss reconstruction, stated Al-Haidan when asked about UAE views on the Iraq Compact. "Control is the number one" priority, he said, vital to facilitating a non-violent transition to democracy. Describing Iraq as "completely out of order," Al-Haidan wondered aloud why the U.S. did not seek out a strong leader, even from among the former ranks of the Iraqi military, to oversee this transitional period. "Now you need a strong man in Iraq." He also argued for the reintroduction of the second echelon of former Iraqi military officials (not necessarily the top tier) as one way to bolster security and permit U.S. forces to leave urban areas in Iraq.

15. (C) The Iraqi people themselves did not see their government taking control of the situation, according to Al-Haidan, who added his view that "this government is not controlling the country." He called on the U.S. to "pave the way" for political reform by establishing security first. "Who will come to build Iraq" if their security is not assured, said Al-Haidan, noting that there was "no one in our Embassy there" due to security concerns. (Note: The UAE's security concerns in Baghdad were complicated by the abduction of its Charge earlier this year. This is the first time we have heard, however, that "no one" currently staffs the mission. End note.) Al-Haidan said that UAE diplomats had been unable to leave their homes and "do anything" due to security concerns; if a diplomat's role was limited to making phone calls, that could be done from Abu Dhabi.

16. (C) Regarding potential UAE investments in Iraq, Al-Haidan said the UAE could not send its own people to Iraq if it did not know whether they would come back safely. Similarly, he said the UAEG could not urge others (i.e., potential investors) to go. He questioned whether other GCC countries had a meaningful diplomatic presence in Baghdad.

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17. (C) Comment: Al-Haidan is generally frank but not a purveyor of doomsday scenarios. We cannot know how closely his strong statements on Iraq reflect the current views of the senior UAE leadership, although he has usually proven to adhere to approved positions and also to reflect broader local (grassroots) concerns. His current position as second-in-command at the MFA suggests his status as a trusted advisor to the Minister. Al-Haidan's views may therefore be a credible reflection of broader sentiments in the UAE, yet may not necessarily represent authoritative policy on how Iraq should be governed. Nevertheless, it may be significant that his pessimistic assessment was shared just days before a Treasury/State visit to discuss the Iraq Compact. End comment.
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